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From Western Medical Times, December, 1920.

DEATH PENALTY ENCOURAGES LYNCHING.

Beverley Robinson, M.D.

New York City.

Such is the thesis of your correspondent, Dr. T.W.E., in your May issue. Perhaps it does. I cannot say. But whether it does, or does not, lynching must be put a stop to and by the most rigid and courageous action of judges, sheriffs and people. After all, it is up to them, and they alone, if united, can and should call a halt to it--barbarous, hellish doing, usually.

Your correspondent further states that the "State has no right to take life;" that "reformation is basis of true punishment," and "refutes economic argument for death penalty." With some of what he writes, I agree; with some of it, I do not. I have had a great deal to do with criminals, and a certain number cannot be reformed, as I believe, by any practical system of reform, or kindness. They are infirm of mind and staying qualities. They cannot, or will not, resist temptation, or recurrence of crime. How to distinguish, or separate these men, women, youths, from others, in an accurate and sufficient way, I do not know, at the present time. Hence many suffer more than their due for the incorrigibility of the few. Life terms for the latter are simply prolonged misery and do no good. When it has been proven and decided that their cold-blooded, repeated crimes, finally culminating in foul murder,

without redeeming features of any kind, I do not see in what way they, or society, are helped by their being continuously locked up, worked and watched. I grant you that this affirmation seems hard and cruel, at first thought, but viewed calmly and thoughtfully, I do not believe it is. When the courts have fairly and rightly decided the case so far as they can, their decision should be final and the verdict carried out surely and swiftly. There should be no delays and no appeals. Certainly the governors of our states should not have the terrible onus thrust upon them, to be clement and merciful, to a previously sentenced murderer.

I have written time and again, in "The Survey," and lately in the "Churchman," and shown, as I believe, the true and only way to manage prisons and prisoners. Discipline must be enforced, but no cruelty should be permitted. Work should be properly compensated and the money should go to the family of the prisoner, or to those wronged by his crime. The work done in prison should be of the best sort, with the best of tools. Then, when the prisoner is released, he would have a far better chance to regain a position, he had lost, through skilful work. It is far easier to help a competent workman than it is to aid one who knows little and what he does know has really no value.

I trust in what I have written I may not appear severe, or ill advised. But after all, society must be protected and good men and women, who do their full duty by themselves and others, must not be at the mercy of conscienceless thugs. The question of capital punishment is, I know, a very difficult one and cannot be decided lightly. At the same time, it is desirable that those who have tried during many years, to do their best by prisons and prisoners, should be heard. One thing is certain, however, namely: If a man, or woman is electrocuted, or hung, it should be surrounded by every possible safeguard of decency and solemnity and none of those revolting occurrences should be for a moment tolerated, which we read of in the papers in connection with prison executions. I mean the presence of curiosity witnesses; I mean the ribald shouting, or jests, or doings of the unfortunates, who occupy the same condemned cell row.

Alas, the pity and sorrow of it all! May God, in His infinite mercy, very soon render capital punishment unnecessary, because certain abhorrent crimes are not committed.

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